



CAMPBELL: Biggest National Security Threat is Debt

Conservatives should not oppose attempts to makes cuts to defense, homeland security.

By Congressman John Campbell

As conservatives, we are always trying to reduce federal spending because there is a lot of waste and inefficiency in government, because more government spending often does not result in better outcomes, and because there are many things the federal government simply should leave to "the States respectively or to the people," as the 10th Amendment instructs.

Clearly, spending for the "common defense," enumerated in the preamble to the Constitution, is one of the unassailed responsibilities of the federal government. No argument there.

But, why is it conservative orthodoxy to assume that defense spending is immune from waste and inefficiency or that more spending in this area alone is always better? It shouldn't be. It is inconsistent and wrong. Defense spending should be subject to scrutiny for cuts just like any other type of federal expenditure.

For example, there are now 800,000 civilian Defense Department employees – 800,000 people not in uniform or carrying a weapon. And, that doesn't include employees of defense

contractors. That number is not available because we don't audit the Pentagon, which is another issue.

Some people estimate that the contractors employ a similarly large number of employees entirely through our defense spending. If that's true, then the civilians working in some way for the Defense Department would outnumber the 1.4 million uniformed members of the Armed Services.

That makes no sense. That is a huge bureaucracy that military personnel tell me does more to get in the way of their duties than help.

Many defense-spending hawks will point out that our Navy now has the smallest number of ships since 1914. OK. What relevance does this have? At the outbreak of World War I, potential European foes had large navies that represented a legitimate threat. Today, we have 10 supercarriers. That is over three times more than the rest of the world combined, including our allies! And, the three foreign fleet carriers are refurbished versions of decades-old ships.

Instead of recapitalizing our existing fleet of Humvees at a much lower cost, we are spending billions developing a new Joint Light Tactical Vehicle with slightly upgraded mission capabilities.

Some people say we need a new strategic bomber to replace our aging B-52s without considering the reduced credibility of the deterrent threat of long-range bombers in an age of missiles and drones.

In no way do I want to reduce the capabilities of the Armed Services to fight existing threats or cut uniformed military pay or benefits. But, throwing more money and equipment at weaponry or strategies to counteract threats that no longer exist makes no sense.

Furthermore, we face another threat, which is much more likely to cause serious damage to U.S. prosperity, hegemony and security than any foreign army. That threat is our huge national debt. Throughout history, great nations have fallen economically before they have been conquered militarily. The most recent example is the Soviet Union, largely brought down by

economic, rather than military, failure.

We must get these debts and deficits under control or they will bring us down more quickly and conclusively than anything else.

We can defend the country for less. We can reduce spending and waste without reducing capability to counter threats. And, we must do so. Not only because no element of the budget should be immune to cuts when you are spending 30 percent more than you are taking in. But, also because it is hard to argue that there is waste and cuts to be made in social programs, but zero waste in defense or homeland security.

More spending does not necessarily yield better results.